

Christina Michalis: AVOID / NOBODY | Installation Galerie1214 (Berlin)
Prints on foil and polyacrylic, mixed media | 2017



An enfilade with transparent, colored panels arranged in close formation, leaning diagonally against the walls, even scattered in several places on the floor; sometimes preventing free passage. Panels that are simultaneously images and image carriers, whose presentation brings a distinct sculptural air into the room: every so often transparent foil surges beyond the edges, at times like protective padding, at others like a lavish throw; shimmering and with a velvety quality.



Upon first glance the material may seem peculiar: twin-wall panels, many of which still display a printed multilingual protective foil on the back. The opposite side is covered with a printed adhesive foil. In some cases the printing is reduced to a subtle trace of color with barely noticeable contours, while other panels feature bold colors and highly pronounced forms. Occasionally there are still strips or leftover tape or protective paper edging.

Every step through the installation facilitates the conscious shift of the lighting perspectives. The room's lighting from above and the daylight that enters from the side permeate each other. It is in the hands – or rather the eyes – of the viewer to orchestrate a perpetual interplay. The roaming vantage point transforms black into tracks, reflections disappear. Depending on the position and incidental light, gray seems to envelop the room with an almost bokeh-like effect. Colors shimmer, change suddenly or emerge unexpectedly in a rainbow spectrum.

The figurative themes seem familiar but also confusing due to their ordinary character: consumer products, a popular camera brand, images of sweatshirts; the head of a cheetah, a single panel with oversized fruits. Practically pretentious is the extreme magnification of a fabric, an enlarged section of warp and woof. Here as well, the motif printing is just subtle enough to prevent representational realism from occurring. The interplay between hard panel material and supple carrier foil is more of

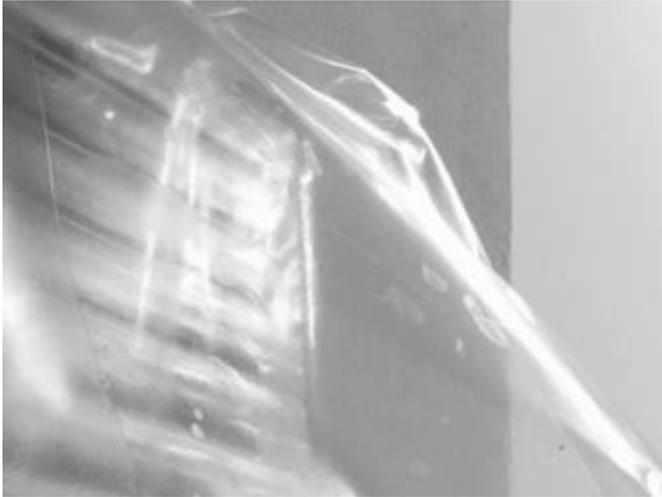
an allusion from the image plane into the room, actually back to the viewer again, who has the urge to touch the material.

In one part of the room, an arrangement of three rectangular panels lying on the floor occupies the center of the space. The edges are offset against each other and the direction of the beams between the panel walls is turned by 90° for each. The placement of the panels makes it necessary to walk around them. The reflections of the tubular lighting on the ceiling thereby move correspondingly, reflected not only on the surfaces through the three panels, but the light is simultaneously multiply refracted within the layered body of the panel.



Those who are not deceived by their own superficiality can soon be caught taking ownership of the installation: crouching, looking, measuring, centering – the way she has configured the exhibition and the path that must be taken to view it, Christina Michalis empowers the viewer with tasks otherwise reserved for the exhibition's artist (or the gallerist).

Does Michalis have a message for us? None of the individual panels are titled. The artist has titled the installation *AVOID / NOBODY*: avoid can be read either as the infinitive of the verb or as a command; nobody is a nonentity. This is an invitation to free interpretation.



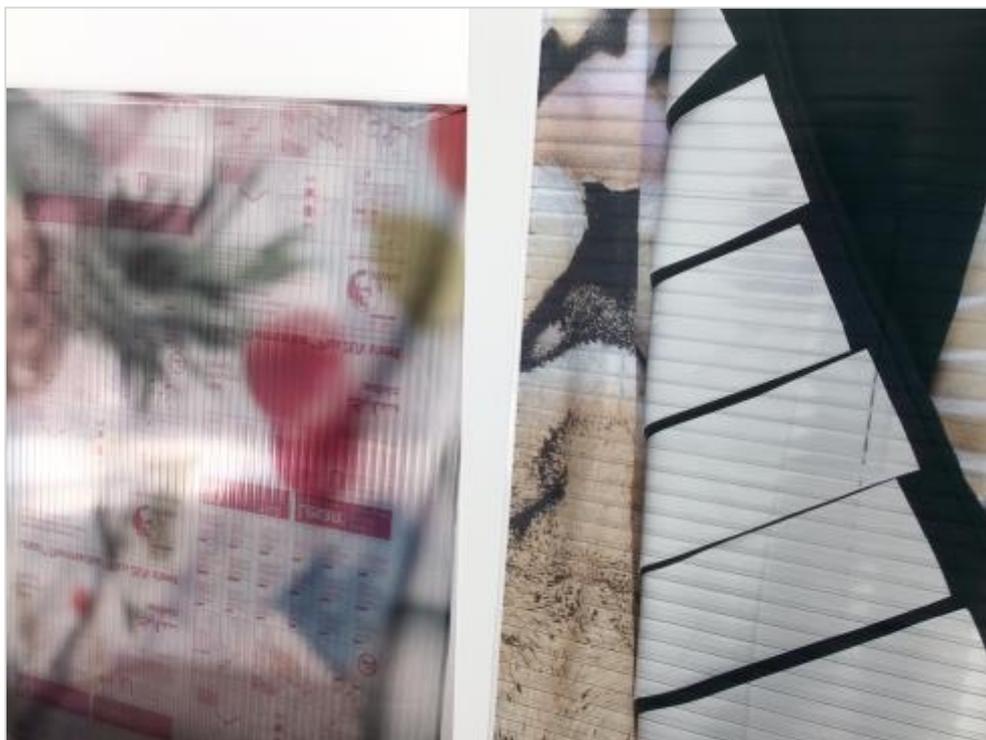
But just like the literal staging of the light reflections, the utilization of the physical grammar of light refraction, with her choice of installation title Michalis appears to be issuing a license for creating sense and at the same time avoiding determining the meaning, shutting off perception in simplistic interpretations. Regarding the questions: 'Is that art?' and 'What does it mean?' the installation replies: See for yourself! Shimmering and reflecting, it asks: Avoid? Expose yourself to it!

Cunning historical point: "Nobody" is what Odysseus answered to the question by giant cyclops Polyphemus, who wanted to know his name, by saying he was (in Greek) oudeis. This little shift in pronouncing the consonants, this diphthong, was responsible for changing the name – the most distinct reference to a person – into its opposite and consequently made the difference between salvation and destruction. In her art, Michalis – like Odysseus – relies on artfulness to achieve potential, entitlement, equality, elsewhere leadership. This doesn't have anything to do with being 'tricky', it is an attitude beyond presumptuousness or evasive irony. This artfulness is not a countervailing force, but rather a positioning which questions, which undermines force.

Artfulness means work. In art, artfulness is both the accomplice of the artist as well as a point of view held, which has to release itself evermore. Held by whom? By the potential – which exists prior to the relevant work and lies waiting again after the work's completion – specifically also due to the work with the material. The industrial material polyacrylic bears (art) historical and societal signatures. References to Arte Povera or conceptual lines of development are evident, but are inevitably confronted with the use of the twin-wall panel as a typical material used for construction. But Michalis' installation has such an eminent material presence that every unilateral positioning would be trivializing. The high-tech foil printing process, with its digitally prepared printing template, delivers results that are paradoxically not serial, high-volume printing with millions of copies but rather revert back to an extremely individual print. This can be seen in the random traces that



Michalis has left in her work or in the reproduction of material faults in the imaged surfaces, which is first possible through the perfection of the printing.





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